

## THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

In 1963 we devoted sixty-one pages of our report to the John Birch Society. Much of the report was highly critical, but because we did not find the society subversive, we were accused in some quarters of having given it a thick whitewashing. It was natural to expect that the extreme Right would view the report with favor, the extreme Left with disfavor, and that the John Birch Society would utilize the favorable statements and ignore our more pointed criticisms. This is precisely what happened, although we were glad to find that J. Edgar Hoover, when asked whether or not the F.B.I. had investigated the society, replied that it had not because it only investigated subversive organizations.

Surprisingly, many liberals who analyzed our conclusions about the society with care, found the report fair and objective. Among these are Dr. H. A. and Bonaro Overstreet, who have written three anti-Communist books that earned for them the criticism of the far Left, and in 1964 published a book called "The Strange Tactics of Extremism," which earned them an equally savage attack from the far Right. The Overstreets devote pages 25 to 112 in their book to the John Birch Society, and although their criticisms are far more emphatic than ours, they do not find the organization subversive.

On page 8 of our 1963 report we concluded our discussion of *The Politician*, with the following statement:

"We are dealing at length with the allegations contained in *The Politician* because it set off the criticism of the John Birch Society when its contents became known, because most of the top officials of the John Birch Society attribute the attacks against it to the contents of *The Politician* and because it serves to highlight the character of Robert Welch as the founder and present leader of the movement. Furthermore, it will be necessary to refer to the document hereafter, in distinguishing between the critics of the statements contained in it and efforts to attribute the statements of its author to all the members of the Society."

*The Politician* was issued as a letter of three hundred sixty-eight pages by Robert Welch, in 1954. This was four years before the founding of the John Birch Society. In this extraordinary document Welch made the accusations that described President Eisenhower, John Foster Dulles, and other high members of our government as either Communists or Communist dupes. We characterized these and similar assertions contained in this 1954 Welch letter as not only ridiculous, but entirely unsupported by proof, and as statements that the members of the John Birch Society as a whole had repudiated. We pointed out that the statements were made four years before the society was even founded, that Mr. Welch assumed all responsibility for them, and that he had repeatedly declared that they had nothing to do with the membership of the John Birch Society.

But since our report was published, and after long and stormy sessions with the National Council of the John Birch Society, Welch decided to publish *The Politician* again. His insistence in this regard led to the resignation of several members of the National Council, but the entire

document was re-published on October 31, 1963. There was now no escaping the fact, despite slight modifications and tempering of some of the more rash statements in the original edition, that it was published at a time when the John Birch Society was active, and was published after sessions with the National Council of the Society, and either with its approval or in spite of its disapproval. Thus there was a repetition of the old controversial accusations and assumptions, and once again the original document was given a far wider circulation with its charges against Milton Eisenhower, described as a Communist of thirty years standing; former President Eisenhower as a "dedicated, conscious agent of the Communist conspiracy," and former Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, Chief Justice Earl Warren, John Foster Dulles and his brother Allen, as aiding the Communist conspiracy, consciously or otherwise.

The private circulation of *The Politician* in the form of a multi-paged letter in 1954 is one thing, because it was then the work of one man, was circulated to his close friends and acquaintances only, and there was no John Birch Society in existence at the time. But its re-publication late in 1963, after a session with the National Council of the Society, is something else again, and in our opinion merits the most serious criticism. We are not alone in our view, because, as we pointed out, some members of the National Council agree with us as evidenced by their resignations when it became clear that Welch was determined to proceed with his project.

Another matter which occurred since the publication of our 1963 report, and which brought added criticism to the Society, was a series of two articles that appeared in *American Opinion*, a monthly magazine issued under the aegis of the Society, by Revilo Oliver, dealing with the assassination of former President Kennedy.\* Mr. Oliver had stated at a speech delivered at Santa Ana Valley High School, that the assassination of President Kennedy was anticipated by the government because he had double-crossed the Communists, and had been "executed by the Communist conspiracy because he was planning to turn American."† Oliver declared that an army unit had been rehearsing Mr. Kennedy's funeral in Washington for a full week before the assassination. But when Oliver was called before the Warren Commission and examined under oath, and was pressed for proof of this assertion, he produced an item from the Jackson Mississippi *Clarion-Ledger* of February 24, 1964, which was an interview with a Captain Richard C. Cloy. Mr. Oliver was then asked: ". . . in the article what Captain Cloy says is not what you state in your speech. He said that before the assassination his special unit had been rehearsing for the anticipated possible death of President Hoover, who was ill." And Mr. Oliver replied: "That is right. . . ."

The two-part article in the *American Opinion* was in such bad taste, and so crammed with undocumented statements, inferences, conclusions, and accusations of disloyalty on the part of the dead President, that it filled its readers with revulsion.

There have been some changes in the organizational structure of the John Birch Society in California. Richard Pine is now the Major California Coordinator, and resides in Rialto, near San Bernardino. Working under his direction are a number of Area Coordinators, as follows: four in Los Angeles County; two in San Diego County; one for San Bernardino and Riverside Counties; one for the San Joaquin Valley, whose area runs

\*"Marxman in Dallas," *American Opinion*, February-March, 1964.

from Bakersfield to Stockton; one in San Jose; one in Marin County, whose jurisdiction extends to Humboldt County; one in Sacramento, whose territory runs to the state line, and two in Orange County. Each chapter in California averages from fifteen to thirty members at present, the California Regional office is located at San Marino, and has recently moved to larger quarters.

Edward Griffin, formerly the major coordinator for California, now heads the Society's National Audio-Visual program, and supervises the circulation of books, movies, tapes, and speakers' programs. Former Congressman John Rousselot became National Director of Public Relations for the Society as of July 1, 1964, and maintains his chief office at the San Marino headquarters, where Robert Welch plans to spend approximately one-third of his time. There are two hundred and ninety-five book stores operated nationally by or through the Society, fifteen of which are situated in California. Other book stores also carry the literature of the Society, and our agents recently visited some of these outlets for the purpose of sampling the sort of materials being sold. One booklet entitled "We Shall Fight in the Streets; A Guide to Street Fighting," by Captain S. J. Cuthbert, was printed in Great Britain. Our copy is the sixth edition, issued in December, 1953, and bears a sticker on which appears "Minutemen, P.O. Box 68, Norborne, Missouri. We Will Never Surrender." Another booklet was entitled "Blaster's Handbook," fourteenth edition, issued by E. I. Du Pont De Nemours & Company, Explosives Department, Wilmington, Delaware, 1963.

These books may, of course, be purchased by anyone, including members of the Minutemen, National States Rights Party, American Nazi Party, or any of the other groups, ultra-right or ultra-left, that may believe they have some practical use for this type of material. We need not point out that if the John Birch Society wishes to disavow any connection with the Minutemen, its literature outlets should not be handling publications bearing the stamps or imprints of the Minutemen.

The John Birch Society *Bulletin* for August, 1964, attacks Robert D. De Pugh, leader of the Minutemen, who was once a member of the Society, and who made "about two years ago the most continuous and determined effort to bring about extensive collaboration of the Minutemen with the John Birch Society that we have experienced with any group." De Pugh is about forty years old, lived in Norborne, Missouri, and organized the Minutemen in 1960 as a military-type underground organization trained in the use of firearms and guerilla warfare. He was once an ardent admirer of Robert Welch and the John Birch Society and became a member. De Pugh later decided that the Birchers were much too gentlemanly and conservative. And at about the same time, the Society decided that De Pugh was a trifle too impulsive and rash, and there came a parting of the ways. De Pugh declared that he resigned, and the John Birch Society declared that it decided to drop him from membership and has a cancelled check for the refund of his dues.

There is no question that the John Birch Society has grown considerably since 1964, when there were one hundred and twenty people on the payroll at the main office at Belmont, Massachusetts; there were sixty coordinators, and the total staff of about two hundred employees cost the Society approximately thirty thousand dollars per week. Its income in 1962 was \$1,200,000.00; in 1963, \$1,621,844.91; in 1964, \$3,000,000. The membership almost doubled between January 1, 1964 and December 31 of that

year. The 1964 budget amounted to approximately \$2,500,000.00 of which twenty per cent was earmarked for California.

According to reliable sources, we would estimate that the Society has grown so rapidly that it has attracted a lunatic fringe that is now assuming serious proportions. We find very little anti-Negro sentiment among the members, but we do find a growing incidence of anti-Semitism, although the Society as a whole is far from anti-Semitic.

We stated on page 35 of our 1963 report that it was too early to predict the outcome of the growing pressures against the continuance of one man rule by Mr. Welch. His insistence upon the re-publication of *The Politician* and the resignation of some members of the National Council now indicate that the authority of Mr. Welch is absolute, and that if members of his National Council become so obdurate that they persist in opposing his projects, then they are either overruled or resign and are replaced by individuals who are more tractable.

During 1964 and early in 1965, the participation of members of the John Birch Society and the activities of young Republican organizations in California drew considerable criticism from Republican party leaders, both young and old. To these critics the Society, usually through its director of public relations, Mr. Roussetot, replied that there were both Democrats and Republicans in the Society, that they were politically active, and had a right to engage in partisan politics.

On page 53 of our 1963 report we observed that "as this movement steadily becomes larger it finds itself facing the problems that inevitably beset any organization of national proportion that is sustained on a high degree of emotionalism. As efforts are made to recruit more members, and as more subordinate officers are sent out into the field, there is an increasing probability that among the new members will be a fringe of unstable, chauvinist people who are prone to accept as accurate the most irresponsible charges of Communist activity. This is the sort of person who is quick to accuse an innocent liberal of being a Communist, and of forever damning anyone who was trapped into joining a Communist front group. Some of these members have been making accusations that are impossible to sustain, and as a result have found themselves facing legal actions for libel or slander."

The John Birch Society is certainly charged with a high degree of emotionalism, and it certainly has grown enormously since 1963. It has, as we predicted, been beset by an influx of emotionally unstable people, some of whom have been prosecuted in the courts for their hoodlum tactics in disrupting meetings, and heckling speakers with whom they disagree.

We do not disavow any of the findings we made in our 1963 report, but we make the foregoing observations for the purpose of bringing that report to date. We are more critical of the Society now than we were then for the reason that it has, in our opinion, merited such criticism by reason of its activities as exemplified by the irresponsible articles by a member of its National Council, the re-publication of *The Politician*, the inexcusable actions of its minority of irresponsible members, and dangerous increase of anti-Semitism among a minority of the membership.

We again emphasize that the F.B.I. has not seen fit to undertake an investigation of the Society because it only investigates organizations suspected of being subversive, and that even the Society's most outspoken critics, H. A. and Bonaro Overstreet, agree with our conclusion that the John Birch Society is not a subversive organization.

In conclusion it should be observed that Mr. John Roussetot was appointed director of public relations for the purpose of presenting a more dignified image of the society to the public. His diligent efforts to that end have apparently been satisfactory, as the John Birch Society *Bulletin* for April, 1965, stated that "... the attitude of the American press as a whole is definitely visibly becoming less unfair to the Society ..."